

MILITARY NURSING IN SOUTH AFRICA.

MILITARY HOSPITAL, POTCHEFSTROOM, TRANSVAAL, S.A.

MY DEAR EDITOR,—I am still working for the S.A.M.N.S., but have been sent with three Sisters (Blake, Davies, Wiese) to open up the above hospital. I, by courtesy, am Matron, but really have, since leaving Wynberg, been on Imperial pay as Sister, as the Overseas contingent will only take one Matron, and naturally it will be the Matron-in-Charge, we expect, who will take us over to Europe as Matron. Meantime, I for one am only too happy to serve where invited. The cantonments here are very prettily laid out, avenues of eucalyptus trees affording a nice shelter, and I should think in the heat of summer a protection to the wards, as all are of the usual corrugated iron, lined wood.

The recruiting for Overseas contingent is, I believe, making a steady advance, and we, of course, have already a few patients. It seems that no large number of men could be got together without some sickness, and if not illness, then accidents from gymnasium or lifting. Our numbers are not so rapid in the recruiting as might be if the everlasting question of pay had not to be considered. The living in a colony is always a more expensive matter than in Europe, and many wish to volunteer, but fear poverty for their wives and families. Many firms are hoping to supplement the Imperial pay to their men, whilst they are serving in the Army. If this is done a much more representative force will be sent from South Africa.

The climate here at this season of the year at Potchefstroom is ideal, and must be very beneficial to those who have been quartered at the Cape for the last three months, as this is their season for rain, and Wynberg has the biggest rainfall in the peninsula; but to those who had just returned from desert life it must have been very refreshing, if only to get soft-water baths, for we felt very much in need of soft water. Skin and hair get fearfully dried and perished in desert life. You will remember I was first Matron of the Base Hospital, Kuruman, and then, as the forces advanced through the Kalaharie, the hospital was packed up and followed the guns, the Sisters and I going on by motor transport, accompanied by other cars, and our rations, and blankets for bedding, very small canvas kit bags with bare necessities, the luggage being with waggons drawn by oxen, who did 10, 15, and sometimes 20 miles a day. There is no doubt that for the highway made through the desert we are indebted to the Motor Corps for the success which really was a big outflanking movement, ending in the fight and victory of Gibeon, for without motors carrying the water for the oxen—the method being to take tanks of water from a bore hole to the outspanning place every day, motorists working at water-carrying to enable the transport arrangements to continue, and even then the number of dead

animals we passed testified to the fearful strain it must have been to men and animals alike.

The Gibeon fight took place on April 27th, and on May 8th I reached Gibeon, with one Sister, leaving two Sisters in charge of Kutmanshoef Hospital. We found a very overcrowded condition of things existing at the hospital, which had 120 patients, chiefly British, and, of course, some Germans. There were about twelve German ladies in Gibeon, who had really helped well in domestic matters for the hospital, cooking, &c., and they had one trained German nurse, one doctor and one orderly, but they naturally devoted their attention, at the request and with the permission of our A.D.M.S., to their own people. The Police Barracks, which was a mile from the battlefield, had been used for a hospital, and was conveniently situated in the centre of Gibeon town, but as soon as we arrived and the patients were getting a little more consecutive treatment, the A.D.M.S. began to look round for a more wholesome place in which to place our wounded men, and decided on the school-house, a nice new building on a koppie near, a splendid site overlooking the Fishrim, a view of which, to be obtained from the hospital veranda, I enclose.

For the first week of our arrival, the whole day was taken up in one long round of dressings; the orderlies and doctors, who had done everything previous to our arrival, had not been able to cope with all details, and we found terrific bed sores, which, owing to the exhausted condition of many men after their long march before the fight, gangrene had set in on pressure spots very quickly; without exception, I think all wounds were septic; and then, too, these brave men had very short rations for a time—plenty of fresh meat and a fair quantity of milk, but biscuits scarce and no meal until transport came in after we got there. However, it was wonderful how splendidly everyone behaved—the orderlies never minding how many hours they worked, and our Major never minding how often he was called in the night, although going full tilt all day and every day. Things improved greatly after we were reduced in numbers sufficiently to move to our clean new hospital, and we moved 75 cases in two days, carrying all the bad ones on stretchers, very gently, which took time, as all were dressing cases; and those well enough by motor. We had been sending all sufficiently well to travel by motor thirty hours' journey to Keetmanshoep; the journey might be done in twelve hours, if everything was favourable, but it depended a little on the condition of the patients, and greatly on condition of road.

After we had moved over, we got two more Sisters who had treked from Ludertizbuck: train to Aus, and from there by mule waggon, which took them thirteen days. They were very tired on arrival, and the Colonel was very considerate in arranging that water should be made hot, to give them a bath—a luxury that needed some arrangement, since we were still hard at it in hospital. We were very glad to receive them,

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